

Ad Hoc Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation Advisory Group Meeting Minutes

City of Alexandria

Ad Hoc Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation Advisory Group Meeting

Thursday, Oct. 7, 2021 | 7:00 p.m. | Virtual Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Advisory Group Members Present: John Hill, Cheryl Leonard, Katherine Waynick, Dino Drudi, Charlotte Hall, Christine Thuot, Howard “Skip” Maginniss

Advisory Group Members Absent: Brian Sands, John Chapman

Staff Present: Yon Lambert, Director of Transportation & Environmental Services (T&ES); Terry Suehr, Director of Project Implantation (DPI); Bill Skrabak, T&ES Deputy Director, Infrastructure and Environmental Quality; Jesse Maines, T&ES Division Chief, Stormwater Management; Erin Bevis-Carter, T&ES Division Chief, Sanitary Sewer Infrastructure; Jessica Lassetter, T&ES; Mitch Dillon, DPI; Alex Carroll, T&ES; Matt Landes, DPI Division Chief, Leadership & Project Management; Amanda Dolasinski, T&ES.

The meeting began at 7:08 p.m.

1. **Electronic Meeting Notice**

Mr. Landes began the meeting by reading the electronic meeting notice and went over general housekeeping items.

2. **Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Motion to approve meeting minutes from 8/12/21)

Motion: Katie Waynick

Second: John Hill

Vote: Unanimous

3. **Welcome**

Terry Suehr, Director of Project Implantation (DPI), introduces Daniel Medina, who was appointed as the Flood Action Alexandria Program Manager for the City, effective Oct. 11.

4. **Introduction**

Daniel Medina introduces himself. He said this is the first time in his career he has an opportunity to serve the community in which he lives.

5. **Question and Response**

Mr. Drudi asks how Dr. Medina fits in organizational structure. Director Suehr said Medina is part of DPI. Medina will eventually take over as the liaison on the Ad Hoc Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation Advisory Group from Matt Landes, Leadership & Project Management.

6. **Discussion: Recording Meeting Minutes**

Group members decide to allow staff to continue taking meeting minutes during public meetings.

7. **Discussion: Advisory Group Meeting Schedule and Communications**

Members discuss frequency of group meetings. Chairman Maginniss said the meetings are spaced

out as City staff balances projects and meetings with a small staff. He suggests one meeting before the end of the year. Mrs. Waynick agrees the group should meet only once more before the end of the year because it will be hard to negotiate calendars as the holidays approach. Mr. Drudi said he believes the public will expect the group to meet and will be disappointed if it doesn't. He suggests a meeting for the second or third week of November. Mr. Drudi adds that a lot of decisions about project priorities were made by staff before group was formed and would like the group to continue meeting to be part of future decisions. Chairman Maginniss said asking staff to push down communications essentially pulls staff away from projects, therefore, putting an inadvertent delay on the progress of projects. Mr. Landes said staff works hard to share information in a timely manner. Mrs. Leonard said it would be helpful if the group could meet with city staff to set priorities.

8. 10-Year Stormwater Utility Plan

Jesse Maines, T&ES Division Chief, Stormwater Management presented this item beginning with the background and history of the Stormwater Utility fee, which is billed twice a year. The fee is based on the amount of the property's impervious area. He explained the staff mails notices about the fee with real estate assessments in February. He explained the fee funds specific Stormwater Program areas, which are operations and maintenance, capital projects for water quality, capital projects for flooding and program administration. The fee is part of a city code that mirrors a Virginia Code. He said the city's use of the fee is audited every year by the state. Mr. Drudi asked if the fee is going to increase every year. Mr. Maines said the fee will support 11 proposed capital projects over 10 years, but the proposal must be voted on by City Council each fiscal year. Mr. Maines provided the funding breakdown of the Stormwater Utility fee: \$281 million for capital projects, \$121 million for debt service, \$83 million for operations, \$2 million for loans. Mr. Maines said the 10-year Stormwater Management Utility plan includes funding for projects, maintenance, and spot improvement projects. Mr. Drudi said he opposed stream restoration projects and wants the funding redirected to capital projects.

9. Grant Program and Permitting

Mr. Maines said city staff worked with the legislature in Richmond to change the state code allowing localities to offer grants to residents if they take flood mitigation measures on their property. The grant went live on July 1 and applications were received as early as August 30. The city has received more than 100 applications. There is an application backlog, but city staff continues to review applications. Mrs. Waynick asked if there was a concern that the city might run out of grant funding by the end of the year, and if applications could be approved retroactively. Mr. Maines said \$750,000 has been appropriated for this year. He said there would be a discussion internally if funding needed to be reappropriated. He said the grants were reviewed and approved in the order complete submissions were received. If an applicant does not have all the required paperwork, staff will contact the applicant and the application will be put aside and held until all requested paperwork is received, while staff move on to review and approve applications that include all required paperwork.

10. Action Item: Memo to City Manager on Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Priorities.

Chairman Maginniss moved this to after staff update presentations.

11. Staff Update: Large Capacity Project

Mr. Maines provided the 10-year (FY21-FY32) funding breakdown for large capacity projects: \$211.5 million for large capacity projects, \$39.3 million for capital maintenance projects, \$20.9 million for water quality projects and \$8.4 million for the Flood Grant Program. The cost of design for the top three projects in FY 2022 is \$19.9 million. The projected total cost of construction for FY 23, FY 24, and FY 25 is \$87.6 million. Those three projects are Commonwealth Avenue and East Glebe Road, Ashby Street and East Glebe Road, and Hooffs Run Culvert Bypass.

Mr. Drudi asked if the results from the streambank soil tests would be shared. Mr. Maines stated that they would be shared with EPC, per City Council direction, and be made public.

12. Staff Update: Neighborhood Spot Improvement Project

Mr. Maines said staff has identified potential projects and visited neighborhoods to speak with neighbors. The city can complete an average of 8 to 11 spot improvement projects annually. Some of the first proposed projects include Mount Vernon Avenue Cul-de-Sac and Hume Avenue Bypass, (both ARPA projects), Hume Avenue inlets and check valve, East Mason Avenue inlets, East Mason/East Alexandria flap gates and check valves, and South Jordan Street.

13. Staff Update: Communications

Mr. Maines said Flood Action Alexandria eNewsletter 3 was released on Oct. 1. The next eNewsletter is planned for December. Various programs are promoted on social media. One new webpage was created to provide information on Storm Sewer Capacity Projects, with new pages for Storm Events and Stormwater Funding scheduled to launch.

14. Staff Update: Flood Mitigation Pilot Grant Program

Mr. Maines said the grant program launched Aug. 30 and more than 100 applications have been received since Oct. 1. A step-by-step user guide is posted on the program's website. A comprehensive program manual is under development and will be posted soon.

15. Staff Update: Data Collection & Early Warning

Mr. Maines said there is a dedicated webpage with information on the rain gauges. Mr. Maines said the City has been meeting informally with Fairfax County and Arlington County to share knowledge about flooding – what are they doing, what are we doing. And now the City is talking more formally with them through NVRC (Northern Virginia Regional Commission) nearly monthly to talk about various common issues. Mr. Maines said discussions keep all communities on the same page as they consider ordinances or policies. Mr. Maines said data from the gauges show what is happening more broadly in the region.

16. Staff Update: Maintenance

Mr. Maines said T&ES Public Works Services has completed a lot of inspection and cleaning. In August, 343 inlets inspected, 318 inlets cleaned, 2,335 feet of storm pipe inspected and cleaned, and 15 days of flood response.

17. Staff Update: Sanitary Sewer

Erin Bevis-Carver provided an update on the Sanitary Sewer Asset Renewal Program: 96,000 feet of city pipe and lateral inspected (82% complete), 523 manholes inspected (87% complete) and phase 1 inspections expected to be completed in late 2021/early 2022. She said staff is working on plan to begin phase 2 inspections, also working on developing rehab time track. She said the staff has released the Sanitary Sewer Master Plan, which will be going to Planning Commission and City Council in November. She mentioned other initiatives moving forward: manhole insert replace project, sanitary sewer upsizing, combined sewer separation, and combined sewer area flooding mitigation.

18. Staff Update: Grants and Alternative Funding

Mr. Maines provided an update on American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) first tranche of 2021 for funding of flash flooding spot improvement projects. He added the Department of Conservation and Recreation Community Flood Preparedness Fund (DCR Grant). It's a brand new, quarterly solicitations. The first one came out Sept. 3. The grant requires a resilience plan or a set of planning documents that address resilience. The City submitted the latter that and got a grant approved for three years. The next step is to develop a formal resilience plan. The second award period has funding for \$17 million and closes on November 5. The city is going to apply for two projects on. There's another application window in January/February 2022. Application windows will continue to open in the future. There's also FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Fund, which focuses on hazard mitigation projects like flooding. Applications are vetted through Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), which works directly with FEMA.

Applications are due Nov. 10.

19. FEMA Flood Map Update

Mr. Maines provided an update on the FEMA flood maps. FEMA has published new flood risk maps for Alexandria. The City hosted virtual community meetings earlier over the summer. Residents are encouraged to review the updated maps because they can impact flood insurance requirements and rates. Questions or appeals can be sent via email to stormwater@alexandriava.gov. Appeals must be received by 5 p.m. on October 20.

20. Action Item: Memo to City Manager on Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Priorities Discussion

Chairman Maginniss said City staff requested that the group write a letter to Council addressing budget items. There was discussion that the letter urge the city manager to implement the proposed 5% Stormwater Utility fee increase and the level of funding for FY2023 outlined in the Stormwater Management Utility 10-Year Plan for FY 2022-FY 2031, adopted by City Council on May 5, 2021. Member input: John Hill said he believes the city put together a good program that is carefully constructed, is based on data, and stretches over 10 years. Mrs. Waynick agreed with Mr. Hill. She said the group needs to be mindful of fee increases regarding affordability to rate payers. She said the measurement of success is going to be the impact that the projects have on residents. She indicated that it was important to keep residents informed. She was disappointed to see a delay already forecasted and wanted to know the reason. Mr. Drudi said the resources needed to do this job are so great that it may not be politically feasible to obtain the resources from taxpayers; therefore, the city needs to devote resources to identify sources of grant funding that we can access to address this problem. His second concern is too many of the top 11 projects are in two neighborhoods. He said he could support the top three projects but would like to rethink projects four through 11.

21. Action Item: Memo to City Manager on Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Priorities Motion

Chairman Maginniss said since staff would like the letter to move to council soon since they're in the middle of budgeting work session. He proposed to take a stab at a draft for the letter with the assistance of Katie, who is the co-chair. Once drafted, he will send it to Matt to verify, then give it to the Committee to approve before sending it to Council. Mr. Drudi said the letter should be voted on at the November meeting. Mr. Hill asked if there was a way to vote telephonically or in a video meeting short of a full meeting to still get something to council. Mr. Landes said any voting would have to occur in person, televised, or recorded virtually. He said the Chair's motion to write a letter based on the framework presented at the meeting could be made. He said, to Mr. Drudi's point, that one of the primary elements of the budget action is the step rate increase. He said that Council would decide whether to fund at that level.

Mrs. Hall made a motion to move forward with the letter to the City Manager. Mrs. Waynick asked if there was a way to meet in the middle, such as suggesting chief concerns in the letter. Mr. Hill seconded the motion. Mr. Drudi initially voted present, then, with amendments to include the fee increase recommendation only applying to FY23, voted in support. Roll call vote: Yes: Chairman Maginniss, Mr. Hill, Mrs. Waynick, Mrs. Thuot, Mrs. Hall, Mrs. Leonard, Mr. Drudi.

Member Updates/Discussion

Mr. Drudi said an incorrect date was listed for a storm that was noted on mail he received from the City. Mr. Maines said he was aware of the error, apologized and said it would be corrected. Mr. Drudi asked about Rose Esber's request regarding grant funding program for condos and wants to know if staff got back to Mrs. Esber about the cleaning of Hooffs Run Culvert and what the inspection found out. Two separate inspections were completed for Hooff's Run culvert, the pre-inspection from Timberbranch to Maple Street and a post inspection (work from earlier cleaning infrom /2021) Linden Street to Duke Street. The city has not received the the results back concerning either of these two surveys from the 3rd party inspection firm. Once results are available, these will be shared. Mrs. Waynick asked about delays in three capacity projects, specifically it looks like the Glebe project is nine to 11 months behind schedule for construction from the original deck that was used to determine the doubling of the stormwater fee. She asked for a follow-up from staff on what's cause the shift in the timeline. Mr. Maines said that the initial

date estimates were preliminary and the new dates with the latest information were more realistic and would be posted after they are revised. He said we are determined to do these projects to help mitigate flooding. Mrs. Waynick asked a follow-up question regarding availability of design funding for capacity projects. She said she saw design funding was available beginning in Q1 of 22, but with the doubling of the stormwater fee, the design funding was slated to have been there previously. She asked if there was a reason the availability of the funding changed. Mr. Maines said the design funding itself was FY 22, for the top three capacity projects. The acceleration of the fee increase provided funding for cleaning and other tasks; the design funding was not available until FY22. Some of the funding that was brought in with that increase in May has been going toward ongoing work, consultant investigations to identify more spot projects, and to design for some of those projects discussed, like the ARPA projects. Mrs. Thuot asked if there are updates for timeline for when the combined stormwater and sewer report might come out. Mrs. Bevis-Carver said the study related to combined sewer flooding in her neighborhood is due before the end of the year, but the study to address combined sewer flooding in the combined sewer area will take some time. The City is currently drafting a RFQU to hire a consultant to provide modeling services. Mrs. Thuot asked if about the schedule for the RFQU. Mrs. Bevis-Carver said she would provide more information in the minutes. It is anticipated that the RFQU for modeling services will be advertised in March/April 2022, the City will review submissions in May/June 2022, and a modeling services contract will be awarded in July/August 2022.

Public Comment

Public comment begins at 9:27 p.m.

Alex Carroll opens to public comments.

Ann Liddle: I had two questions early on. In looking over the CIP list, it dawned on me, I wanted to know if any of those will affect my sewer area. I'd like to know more about what can be done in this area. It strikes me a lot of money is being spent on many other parts of the city, I'd like to know what more can be done for this area. The second, I got an email about flood watch portals and I looked at them very carefully. They have buttons you can go in and look at flood information, but there's no watershed area for combined sewer area – can that be addressed? Mr. Skrabak, T&ES Deputy Director, Infrastructure and Environmental Quality, said the City would look at potentially adding additional data gathering.

John Craig: My thanks to the Ad Hoc Advisory Group for spending your personal time on this very important issue. Mr. Craig asked if the planning and funding plans were directed to only 11 projects through 2031. He said he lived in a neighborhood not covered by any of the 11 projects. Mr. Skrabak said the intent is that those are the identified projects from the CASSCA [City of Alexandria Storm Sewer Capacity Analysis] study and anecdotal evidence from the last three flooding events. He anticipates that stormwater utility funding will continue. He added that the City will be adding CIP funding in the 11th year. Mr. Skrabak said it's going to take decades to solve the flooding problem. The City is not in a position to identify where other additional problem areas are. Funding will be set aside in the future for this purpose. This will be a multi-decade process. Mr. Drudi asked Mr. Craig if he experienced flooding on Aug. 15. Mr. Craig said he has experienced flooding several times this year and it was documented to Alex 311. Mr. Drudi asked Mr. Craig if he was quoted in the newspaper or radio. Mr. Craig said he was quoted on WTOP and several times in newspapers, the last time was in the Washington Post. Mr. Drudi asked how much water his sump pumps pumped out. Mr. Craig said his sump pumps have a combined capacity of 20,000 gallons per hour and the flood was too great for the sump pumps.

Mrs. Rose Esber asked if there were projects planned for upper King Street. She also asked why condo owners are still excluded from grant programs. Mr. Maines said condos are eligible to apply for the grant. Through this pilot grant, it is the association that can apply for the grant program. Some flood mitigation measures are greater than \$10,000. The City understands that some of the measures suitable for flood proofing a large building may cost a lot more than \$10,000, which would involve a 50/50 match. The City is considering options within the stormwater utility credit program. The City wants to include more flood proofing and mitigation measures in the credit program. Floodproofing would be a good additional tool and the City is working on modifying the credit program. Mrs. Esber asked if the City had a list of companies that make flood mitigation devices. Mr. Maines said that the City did not have a program that

vettled vendors and, in fact, it is unable to recommend vendors. He said that the city worked with applicants to say explain types of flood mitigation devices. He said the city wants to be flexible and provide more technical assistance. Mr. Maines said that the City did not have any spot projects planned for King Street.

22. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 9:47 p.m.

Motion: Charlotte

Second: John Hill